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REJOICE WITH THEM THAT REJOICE.

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A S E R M O N,

PREACHED IN

CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL,

ON OCCASION OF

THE PRINCE OF WALES'S MARRIAGE,

MARCH 10, 1863.

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BY

HENRY ALFORD, D.D.

DEAN OF CANTERBURY.

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A

SERMON,

&c.

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“Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.”—Rom. xii. 15.

IN speaking to you on the great national event which is to happen to-day, it seems to me that I ought to combine what I have to say from this place, with some remarks on a circumstance which occupies the thoughts of many serious and reflecting persons.

We are in the midst of the season set apart, in the apportionment of the Christian year by the Church, as a time of repentance and self-examination, and in consequence, of abstinence from ordinary indulgences. I need not say here, how much such a season is to be prized,—how precious it is to all who really are employed in the work of perfecting holiness in the fear of God. Thus much I may take for granted, that we are all of one mind as

to the value and the use of this time of quietness and of rest from the distractions of the world. We feel that it serves to brace up our spiritual energies for the conflicts which are to come, and causes us to know ourselves better, and to know God better, than we could have done without it.

But here, as in every matter regarding the welfare of our souls, there is a safe path, and there is an unsafe one: there is a wise view of our duty, and there is an unwise one. The safe path, and the wise view were taken, I conceive, by the Church, when she threw off the corruptions of former ages. At that time she retained what was good and according to the mind of Christ, and rejected all that had led to mischief and was not consistent with the teaching of Holy Scripture. Now our Lord, in the solemn discourse with which He opened His Ministry, laid down for us an absolute rule in regard to such seasons. He said, "Thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret." In consequence, the Reformed Church, while she has retained seasons, and days, of fasting and abstinence, has carefully refrained from laying down any prescribed details of the way in which the duty is to be carried out. Our Lord has forbidden to us the outward show of mortification before the world, and commanded us to let our ordinary seasons of humiliation be spent rather in inward and secret abasement, than in an



ostentation of grave looks and chastened demeanour before men. Nay, He has gone further than this. In the acts which He enjoins, as rather befitting the Christian's season of fasting, He has specially selected those which belonged to festal customs. The anointing of the head was the preparation for the banquet and the guest-chamber. The washing of the face was an act which to Eastern ears would seem the very opposite to the accustomed practice of letting the person remain squalid and uncared for in times of humiliation. The Christian is to carry on inwardly, and in his spirit, and before his Father in secret, his genuine outpourings of grief of soul for his sins; not to parade them on his person, and in unusual inconsistencies with his daily practice.

Now let me not be mistaken. There is, and must be, an outward sobriety, and a special moderation in outward enjoyments, belonging to such a frame of mind as that which I have been describing. A man cannot be lamenting his sins before God, and taking his fill of worldly dissipation, at the same time. And therefore the general habit among Christians of the members of the Reformed Churches is a wise and good one;—to check, at such a season, even their ordinary lawful indulgence in social pleasures: to let the whole outward aspect of the time be such as to encourage, rather than interrupt, the Christian's attitude of mind.

So far I believe is wise and safe; is according to

our Blessed Lord's command, taken in its meaning and its spirit. But the unwise and the unsafe course is entered on, whenever this natural practice at such a time is made into a strict unbending rule, and allowed to interfere with the acknowledged higher and more glorious offices of the Church of Christ, in the nation, or in the family, or in the individual life. For after all, the appointment of the Christian seasons,—the allotting of certain subjects to certain times,—is a human, not a Divine arrangement: not commanded by our Lord, nor necessary to salvation. And therefore such institutions must not be regarded as rigidly binding on all persons at all times, to the neglect or the depreciation of other things which in their very nature come *before* those institutions, and are of higher obligation in kind. To do this, would be to observe the letter at the expense of the spirit: and to shew that we loved to be entangled in yokes of bondage, rather than to carry out the glorious liberty of the children of God. And this is exactly one of those matters where that liberty ought to be ever borne in mind and respected, and jealously guarded. It may be, that we ourselves, taking into account our own frame of mind at this season, would not choose it for festive celebrations in our own families: it may be that a general custom may have thereby grown up in the Christian Church, of rather selecting another time than this for our marriages. So far, all may be

well: but no further. The moment we lay down rules in such a thing, either for ourselves or for others, we are acting in an unchristian spirit, and are violating the fundamental maxims of Christian liberty. And it would be not a good symptom of the state of intelligent Churchmanship in this land, if such a spirit were at all to be shewn among us with regard to the Royal marriage of this day. To rejoice with them that rejoice,—to prefer mercy to sacrifice, kindly and earnest sympathy to rigid observance of even the most salutary Church ordinances, ought to be the unanimous spirit of English Churchmen, as it is that of all the sounder and better part of them.

God Himself has appointed the holy estate of matrimony, and our blessed Lord adorned and beautified it by His presence, and first miracle that He wrought: and it is commended in Scripture to be honourable among all men, and set forth to us by St. Paul as representing the relation that is betwixt Christ and His Church. It is not for us to limit it to certain times and seasons, nor to make the commandment of God of none effect by our traditions. There may be certain times less appropriate than others for that festivity which must accompany marriage: but any reasonable cause ought to set such secondary considerations aside,—and the clinging to them shews an unhealthy and morbid spirit,—a mind in which the true relative importance of things has been displaced. Some may have their scruples,

but let them remember, that we were not sent into the world to please and indulge ourselves.

And there is more even than this involved. This Church of Christ among us ought to be the great fountain-head of sympathy in the land:—she ought ever to be foremost in all kindly and hearty participation of the nation's joy and the nation's sorrow: she ought to gather all in her maternal arms, and to teach all to look to her for encouragement, and for consolation, and for fostering care, "through all the changing scenes of life." God forbid that she should mar the joy of an occasion like this:—that she should so far forget her holy mission, so far retrace her steps towards the bondage out of which she has escaped, as sullenly to stand by, and refuse to lead the nation's festal celebration of that great blessing which God is granting to us to-day. It ought to be her glory, that she is sound enough and strong enough in the faith, and elastic enough in the exercise of her large affections, to be able, for love's sake, and for gratitude's sake, to lay aside her own particular employment, and her own cherished frame of mind, and think, not on her own, but on the things of others.

And yet, are they the things of others? Does not the union of this day light up a spark of hope for our children's children, in every household in England? Who that remembers the dark things that have been, who that reflects on what may

again be, but will bless God in his inmost soul, that the domestic purity and peace which has in our time made our royal house so bright an example, is this day being sealed to those who shall come after us? To what do we owe it, that we are able to set the tongue and the pen absolutely free in our land, and to engage in the great problems of political and social life with our energies unfettered, and free to expand where they will? To what do we owe it, that loyalty and contentment, even in privation and suffering, are universal among our people? To what, that we were able last Saturday to pour out our millions unchecked around the very path of royalty without a fear? To what, that in the densest crowd ever known in history, filling for miles the streets of the largest city in the world, not a sound was heard but that of welcome, not a thought cherished but those of fervent gratitude and earnest aspirations for blessing? To this it is, my brethren, that we owe all these things:—to the simple reality, and unbroken tenor, of the blameless domestic life of that family, which to-day receives the pledge of continuance into future generations. It has been this chiefly, this, united with and gathering round itself all that is good,—this, making the English people feel, from the peer in his palace down to the labourer in his cottage, that it is well for us to be so ruled,—it has been this, which, under God, has carried us



safely through shocks which have laid other thrones in the dust:—this that makes our land, through the wide globe, the envy and admiration of mankind: this that causes other nations, when embarking on a course of self-acquired freedom, to yearn for the guidance of even a youth of our royal household. And our churches, our schools, our missions to the colonies and to the heathen, have all grown up and prospered, under the fostering care of such a rule, and the bright light of such an example.

And now what remains, but that we should invoke God's choicest blessing on that royal pair, who will be this day made one—that we should invite all good Churchmen to rejoice with them that do rejoice, and shew the world that their service of Him whom we obey is not one of bondage, but one of perfect freedom?

It seems but a short time since I occupied this place on another public occasion, when in the midst of the festal season of Christmas God called on us to weep with them that did weep. Let us, in the midst of our joyful thoughts this day, also fervently pray that it may be the beginning of rich consolation and peace to her heart, whose deep wound has never yet been healed: that it may bring to her the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

And for those upon whom at this hour all thoughts are fixed,—may Almighty God pour

upon them the riches of His grace, may He sanctify and bless them, that they may please Him both in body and soul, and live together in holy love unto their lives' end.

May they see their children's children, and peace upon Israel. Amen.

THE END.

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR.*

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